

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NO. AB-43(SUB-NO. 172X)

**Illinois Central Railroad Company
Abandonment Exemption
In Adams County, Mississippi**

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, Illinois Central Railroad Company (IL) has filed a petition under 49 U.S.C. 10502 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 in connection with the abandonment and discontinuance of operations over a rail line, located in Nachez, in Adams County, Mississippi. The rail line is approximately 3.9 miles long, from milepost LN 94.48 to milepost LN 98.38, is stub-ended and serves a single shipper. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the exemption becomes effective, the railroad will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances, and to dispose of the right-of-way.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

IC states in its application that the rail line, Nachez Spur, is located in a downtown setting and extends to a connection with IC's Chicago-New Orleans main line at Brookhaven, Mississippi. The Nachez Spur meanders through the downtown area of Nachez, and extends approximately seven blocks through the middle of Monroe Street. This configuration creates the potential for serious conflict with vehicular and pedestrian traffic which makes train movements awkward and difficult.

In its Application, IC states that the Nachez Spur provided rail service to a lone shipper, Titan Tire, located at its northern end. All rail traffic consisted of inbound carloads of carbon black. IC states that no rail operations, of any kind, have taken place since Titan Tire ceased operations in April 2001. Prior to its closure, Titan Tire received a single carload of carbon black during 2001. IC believes that there is no reasonable possibility for future development of new rail traffic over the Nachez Spur. Additionally, IC states that because the Nachez Spur is stub-ended, no overhead traffic and no passenger trains currently operate over this rail line.

IC states that no hazardous materials were transported on the Nachez Spur in recent times. However, at one time, a mechanical facility, that included a coaling and diesel facility, turntable, and several support and storage buildings were once located at milepost LN 97.1. IC states that all of these structures have been removed.

If the abandonment is approved, IC states that, with the exception of Monroe Street, it intends to salvage all rail, ties, and track materials. IC will consult with the City of Natchez regarding the disposition of salvageable materials running through Monroe Street. IC also states that it intends to leave the railbed, subgrade, and five bridges in place.

IC believes the abandonment, if approved, will enhance public health and safety by eliminating three private and 23 public at-grade crossings. The Mississippi Department of Transportation, Rails Division, stated that, because the rail line runs through the middle of Monroe Street for seven blocks, train operations raise significant vehicular and pedestrian safety concerns.

There are a total of five bridges located on the right-of-way, four of which are 50 years old or older. IC believes that all of the bridges are of ordinary construction and have no historic significance or value. The Mississippi Department of Archives & History, Historic Preservation Division (SHPO) has determined that none of the structures are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. However, IC has no plans to remove or alter these structures as part of the proposed abandonment.

As noted above, because a portion of the Natchez Spur runs through Monroe Street, IC presumes that the rail line would not be available for any alternative public use. In addition, IC has not been informed of any interest that may exist for conversion of the right-of-way into a recreational trail.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The railroad has submitted an environmental report that concludes the quality of the human environment will not be affected significantly as a result of the abandonment or any post-abandonment activities, including salvage and disposition of the right-of-way. The railroad has served the environmental report on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Board's environmental rules at 49 CFR 1105.7(b). We have investigated and reviewed the record in this proceeding.

Comments have been received from the following agencies stating that the proposed abandonment will have no adverse impacts: U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Geodetic Survey; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service; U.S. Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - Vicksburg District, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources; Mississippi Museum of Natural Science; and the Mississippi Department of Archives & History - Historic Preservation Division.

SEA has also contacted the Mississippi Department of Transportation, Rails Division and the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, Uncontrolled Sites Branch (MS-DEQ).

The MS-DEQ has advised that due to the nature of past railroad operations, many railroad facilities have significant environmental problems.

CONDITIONS

In response to the concerns expressed by U.S. Department of Commerce, National Geodetic Survey, the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, Uncontrolled Sites Branch (MS-DEQ), and the Adams County Board of Supervisors, we recommend that the following conditions be imposed on any decision granting abandonment authority.

1. Illinois Central Railroad Company (IC) shall notify the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Geodetic Survey (NGS) prior to any salvage activities that will disturb or destroy the single survey marker on the right-of-way. IC will allow the NGS 90 days from the issuance of any decision granting abandonment authority in this proceeding to survey the rail line for any historical benchmarks or monumentation.

2. Illinois Central Railroad Company shall consult with the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, Uncontrolled Sites Branch, regarding specific requirements for verifying that the right-of-way is free of hazardous waste contamination prior to initiation of any salvage activities.

3. Illinois Central Railroad Company shall consult with the Adams County Board of Supervisors, regarding the potential salvage of track materials from Monroe Street prior to initiation of any salvage activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, as currently proposed, and subject to the recommended mitigation measures, abandonment of the line will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the environmental impact statement process is unnecessary.

Alternatives to the proposed abandonment would include denial (and therefore no change in operations), discontinuance of service without abandonment, and continued operation by another operator. In any of these cases, the existing quality of the human environment and energy consumption should not be affected.

PUBLIC USE

Following abandonment and salvage of the rail line, the right-of-way may be suitable for other public use. A request containing the requisite four-part showing for imposition of a public use condition (49 CFR 1152.28) must be filed with the Board and served on the railroad within the time specified in the Federal Register notice.

TRAILS USE

A request for a notice of interim trail use (NITU) is due to the Board, with a copy to the railroad, within 10 days of publication of the notice of the petition for exemption in the Federal Register. Nevertheless, the Board will accept late-filed requests as long as it retains jurisdiction to do so in a particular case. This request must comply with the Board's rules for use of rights-of-way as trails (49 CFR 1152.29).

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

The Board's Office of Public Services responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact the Office of Public Services directly at (202) 565-1592, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Washington, DC 20423.

COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, you should send an **original and two copies** to Vernon A. Williams, Office of the Secretary, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Troy Brady, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB- 43 (Sub No. 172X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Troy Brady at (202) 565-1593.

Date made available to the public: **February 1, 2002.**

Comment due date: March 4, 2002. (30 Days)

By the Board, Victoria J. Rutson, Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis.

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment

MAP TO BE SCANNED